

# Herring Gull

*Larus argentatus*

Spiraling above a fishing boat or squabbling at a dock or parking lot, Herring Gulls are the quintessential gray-and-white, pink-legged “seagulls.” They’re the most familiar gulls of the North Atlantic and can be found across much of coastal North America in winter. A variety of plumages worn in their first four years can make identification tricky—so begin by learning to recognize their beefy size and shape.

## Keys to Identification

### Size and Shape

Herring Gulls are large gulls with hefty bills and robust bodies. In flight, they look barrel-chested and broad-winged compared to smaller species such as Ring-billed Gulls.

### Color Pattern

Adults have light-gray backs, black wingtips, and white heads and underparts. In winter, dusky streaks mark their heads. Herring Gulls take four years to reach adult plumage. Juveniles are mottled brown; second-year birds are brown but show gray on the back. Third-years have more gray on the back and more white on the head and underparts. The legs are dull pink at all ages.

### Behavior

Herring Gulls patrol shorelines and open ocean, picking scraps off the surface. Rallying around fishing boats or refuse dumps, they are loud and competitive scavengers, happy to snatch another bird’s meal. They spend much of their time perched near food sources, often in congregations of gulls.

### Habitat

Look for Herring Gulls in winter along coasts and near large reservoirs, lakes, and major rivers. They feed in habitats as diverse as open water, mudflats, plowed fields, and garbage dumps, and gather in almost any open space near food. In summer, they’re most likely to be seen along the Atlantic Coast, Great Lakes, and coastal Alaska; they also breed across the boreal far north.

## Measurements

### Both Sexes

- Length - 22 - 26 inches
- Wingspan - 56.9 - 57.5 inches
- Weight - 28.2 - 44.1 ounces

